

Have A Seat Using Child Safety Seats

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Hundreds of children are killed or injured every year after being thrown against dashboards or windshields during vehicle accidents. Even a 20-mph collision can send an unrestrained child into such hard, unyielding objects with a 400-pound impact force. The easiest and most effective answer to preventing these type injuries is to use child safety seats, something many states now require by law.

Child safety seats work by keeping children from being thrown about inside a vehicle or, even worse, ejected during a crash. These seats absorb some of the crash impact and also distribute crash forces more evenly over the child's body. There have been documented instances where rescuers pulled infants unharmed from smashed child seats held together only by their fabric. During those accidents, the child seats acted as "cocoon" that protected the precious lives strapped inside them.

As a father of four, it amazes me the government has to impose laws enforcing the care and safety of children in automobiles. It's something we should do automatically for our children's safety. Yet, as I travel I see many adults who don't bother to wear their seat belts, much less ensure their children are restrained properly. You have to wonder what they're thinking, or if they're thinking at all.

By keeping children properly restrained, you solve at least two problems that can arise when kids ride with you. First, if you have an accident, it's easier to maintain immediate post-impact control of your vehicle if you're not trying to catch your children and protect them from flying around inside. Second, unrestrained children sometimes cause accidents by acting up, thinking the driver is too busy to intervene. If the situation gets so out of hand the driver has to respond, there's the danger of becoming distracted and having an accident. My children always ride in child seats for these reasons. I'd rather prevent an accident than try to survive one.

The challenge of keeping kids safe while riding in vehicles has received a lot of attention from the National Safe Kids Campaign, which offers the following child safety seat recommendations:

- Whenever possible, children 2 years old and younger should ride in safety seats secured to the vehicle's backseat. The middle of the backseat is the safest location for a child safety seat.
- Children under 1 year old and weighing less than 20 pounds should ride in a rear-facing seat. If a vehicle such as a standard-cab pickup doesn't have a backseat and the child must ride up front, ensure the passenger air bag is turned off.
- At 1 year old and 20 pounds, children can ride in a forward-facing seat equipped with internal harnesses.
- When a child reaches the manufacturer's height and weight limit of his forward-facing seat, he should ride in a belt-positioning booster seat used in combination with an adult lap and shoulder belt.

Children are ready for an adult safety belt without a booster when:

- They can sit against the back of the seat and bend their knees over the seat's edge.
- The lap belt makes good contact across their hips.
- The shoulder belt makes good contact across their chest and collarbone.

No matter how carefully we drive, we can't always avoid an accident. However, the one thing we can do is protect our children by ensuring they're restrained in a properly installed child safety seat anytime they're in a moving vehicle. For any parent, the importance of doing this should be a no-brainer.



FYI

For more information on child restraint systems, visit the National Safe Kids Campaign Web site at <http://www.usa.safekids.org/CPSWeek2006/carseat.html>.

Did You Know?

Car seats for children have been manufactured since 1933. The Bunny Bear Company made several designs of children's car seats, but their purpose wasn't to protect the child in an accident. Instead, these seats confined the children, raised them above the passenger seat and made them more visible to adults in the front seat. The modern child safety seat was invented in England by Jean Ames in 1962.